

## DECISION RECORD

Reference: Environmental Assessment (EA) for Grazing Authorization, #NM-060-00-208

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the issuance of a ten year grazing permit to Thomas A. Knight for the Bureau of Land Management grazing allotment #63092. The permit will authorize 10 Animal Units (AU's) yearlong at 100 percent federal range for 120 Animal Unit Months (AUM's). Cattle will be the authorized class of livestock.

Any additional mitigation measures identified in the environmental impacts sections of the referenced environmental assessment have been formulated into stipulations, terms and conditions.

If you wish to protest this proposed decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.2, you are allowed 15 days to do so in person or in writing to the authorized officer, after the receipt of this decision. Please be specific in your points of protest. In the absence of a protest, this proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice, in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3. A period of 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final, is provided for filing an appeal and petition for the stay of the decision, for the purpose of a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (43 CFR 4.470). The appeal shall be filed with the office of the Field Office Manager, 2909 West Second, Roswell, NM, 88201, and must state clearly and concisely your specific points.

Signed by T. R. Kreager  
Assistant Field Manager-Resources

5/29/01  
Date

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
for  
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION**

**ALLOTMENT 63092**

**EA-NM-060-00-208**

**February, 2000**

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Roswell Field Office  
Roswell, New Mexico**

## **I. Introduction**

When authorizing livestock grazing on public range, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has historically relied on a land use plan and environmental impact statement to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A recent decision by the Interior Board of Land Appeals, however, affirmed that the BLM must conduct a site-specific NEPA analysis before issuing a permit or lease to authorize livestock grazing. This environmental assessment fulfills the NEPA requirement of taking a hard look for a site-specific analysis of the effects of issuing a new grazing lease on allotment 63092.

The scope of this document is limited to the effects of issuing a grazing lease for the public lands in allotment 63092. Other future actions such as range improvement projects will be addressed in a project specific environmental assessment. There are no current plans for additional management actions on this allotment.

### **A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action**

The purpose of issuing a new grazing lease would be to authorize livestock grazing on the public lands on allotment 63092. The lease would specify the types and levels of use authorized, and the terms and conditions of the authorization pursuant to 43 CFR §§4130.3, 4130.3-1, 4130.3-2 and 4180.1.

### **B. Conformance with Land Use Planning**

The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (October 1997) has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan's Record of Decision. The proposed action is consistent with the RMP/EIS.

### **C. Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans**

The proposed action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1535 et seq.) as amended; the Federal Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.); Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management and Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands.

## **II. Proposed Action and Alternatives**

### **A. Proposed Action:**

The proposed action is to authorize Thomas A. Knight a ten year grazing lease for 10 cows yearlong at 100% Federal Range for 120 Animal Unit Months (AUM's) on allotment 63092.

### **B. No Grazing Alternative**

This alternative would not issue a new grazing lease. There would be no livestock grazing authorized on public land within allotment 63092.

### **III. Affected Environment**

#### **A. General Setting**

Allotment 63092 is located in Lincoln County, approximately 17 miles north of Carrizozo, New Mexico on the west side of Highway 54. The public lands are in one block that total 560 acres. The lease for grazing is only for the public land and therefore does not reflect the total number of livestock for the entire ranch unit.

This allotment lies outside the Roswell Grazing District boundary established subsequent to the Taylor Grazing Act (TGA). Overall livestock numbers for the ranch are not controlled. The amount of forage produced on public land is the determining factor on the number of authorized livestock for the public land.

The landscape is rolling to hilly area at the base of the west slope of the Jacarillo Mountains. The elevation is 5800 feet above sea level. Grass understory and shrub species grow in conjunction with pinion-juniper. The average precipitation for the area is 12 to 16 inches. Most of the annual precipitation falls during high intensity, short duration thunderstorms. More detailed information of the area is discussed under the affected resources section.

The following resources or values are not present or would not be affected: Prime/Unique Farmland, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Floodplains, Minority/Low Income Populations, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Hazardous/Solid Wastes, Wetlands/Riparian Zones. Native American Religious Concerns, Invasive Non-native species. Cultural inventory surveys would continue to be required for public actions involving surface disturbing activities.

#### **B. Affected Resources**

1. Soils: The Soil Survey of Lincoln County Area New Mexico describes the soils present on allotment 63092 as the Deama-Pastura association. The soils are moderately undulating, on uplands with 0 to 8 percent slopes and irregular shapes. The area is 40 percent Deama very cobbly loam, and 30 percent Pastura loam. Other soils include Harvey and Darvey. The soils are derived dominantly from limestone.. More information on the soils can be found in the "Soil Survey of Lincoln County Area New Mexico".

2. Vegetation: This allotment is within the pinyon-juniper vegetative community as identified in the Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix I I of the draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community. The distinguishing feature for the pinion -juniper community is that the area has the potential to have pinion, juniper, or mountain

mahogany in the description of the potential plant community. The primary consideration for inclusion into this community type is the influence of topography, elevations, and slopes.

A rangeland inventory for vegetation production and ecological range site condition was performed on this allotment in 1991. Analysis of the inventory data indicates that the Hills CP-3 range site produces sufficient forage for the proposed number of livestock in addition to the wildlife in the area. Copies of the inventory data are available at the Roswell Field Office. The existing vegetation consists of grasses such as wolftail, blue grama, 3-awns, black grama, and muhly. The shrub and tree species include snakeweed, yucca, cactus, one-seed juniper, alligator bark juniper, and pinion.

3. Wildlife: Game species occurring within the area include mule deer, mourning dove, and scaled quail. Raptors that utilize the area on a more seasonal basis include the Swainson's, redtailed, and ferruginous hawks, American kestrel, and great-horned owl. Numerous passerine birds utilize the area due to the variety of grasses, forbs, and shrubs. The most common include the western meadowlark, mockingbird, horned lark, killdeer, loggerhead shrike, and vesper sparrow. Reptiles include a variety of snakes, lizards, and amphibians.

A general description of wildlife occupying or potentially utilizing the proposed action area is located in the Affected Environment Section (p. 3-62 to 3-71) of the Draft Roswell RMP/EIS (9/1994).

4. Threatened and Endangered Species: There are no known threatened or endangered species of plant or animals on Allotment 63093. A list of federal threatened, endangered and candidate species reviewed for this EA can be found in Appendix I I of the Roswell Approved RMP (AP I I -2). There are no designated critical habitat areas within this allotment. The swift fox is a Federal Candidate species that may occupy or utilize the area; refer to the Biological Opinion (AP 11-38) in the Roswell RMP for a detailed description of the range, habitats and potential threats. The mountain plover has been recently proposed for listing as an Endangered Species. It is associated with shortgrass and shrub-steep landscapes throughout its breeding and wintering range. Historically, on the breeding range, it occurred on nearly denuded prairie dog towns and in areas of major bison concentration. The mountain plover are considered to be strongly associated with sites of heaviest grazing pressure, to the point of excessive surface disturbance. Short vegetation, bare ground, and a flat topography are now recognized as habitat-defining characteristics at both breeding and wintering locales.

5. Livestock Management: The allotment is operated as a cow/calf operation. The ranch boundary and interior fences are barbed wire to contain livestock. The ranch is divided into pastures which facilitate pasture rotation. Actual livestock numbers on the entire ranch are not controlled by the BLM as explained in the General Setting portion of the Affected Environment section above.

6. Visual Resources: The allotment is located within a Class IV Visual Resource Management area. This means that contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature in the landscape in terms of scale. However, the changes should repeat the basic elements of the landscape. Much of the area can be seen from Highway 54.

7. Water Quality: No perennial surface water is found on the Public Land on this allotment .

8. Air Quality: Air quality in the region is good. The allotment is in a Class 11 area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality as defined in the public Clean Air Act. Class 11 areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

9. Recreation: Recreation opportunities are limited in this grazing allotment because the small acreage of the isolated parcel. There is legal public access to some of the parcels of public land.

Recreation activities that may occur on the public lands within this allotment are: hunting, sightseeing, Off Highway Vehicle Use, primitive camping, mountain biking, horseback riding and hiking. Due to the fact that public land boundaries are not marked adequately or identified by signs and/or fences the general public land user is reluctant to use the public lands in fear of being in trespass on private land. Off Highway Vehicle designations for public lands within this allotment are classified as "Limited" to existing roads and trails.

10. Cave/Karst: A complete significant cave or karst inventory has not been completed for the public lands located in this grazing allotment. Presently, no known significant caves or karst features have been identified within this allotment. The allotment is located within a designated area of high karst or cave potential.

#### **IV. Environmental Impacts**

##### **A. Impacts of the Proposed Action**

1. Soils: Livestock remove the cover of standing vegetation and litter, and compact the soil by trampling. These effects can lead to reduced infiltration rates and increased runoff. Reduced vegetative cover and increased runoff can result in higher erosion rates and soil losses, making it more difficult to produce forage and to protect the soil from further erosion. These adverse effects can be minimal if an adequate vegetative cover is maintained on the soil. Proper utilization levels and grazing distribution patterns are expected to retain sufficient vegetative cover on the allotment, this will maintain the stability of the soils. Soil compaction and excessive vegetative use will occur at small, localized areas such as bedding areas and along trails. Positive affects from the proposed action may include acceleration of the nutrient cycling process and chipping of the soil crust by hoof action may stimulate seedling growth and water infiltration.

2. Vegetation: Vegetation will continue to be grazed and trampled by domestic livestock as well as other herbivores. Ecological condition and trend is expected to remain stable and/or improve over the long term with the proposed authorized number of livestock and existing pasture management. Rangeland vegetation inventory data indicates that there is an adequate amount of forage for the proposed number of livestock and for wildlife. The pinion and juniper can be expected to increase in density whether the area is grazed by livestock or not. The increased density of pinion and juniper will increase the competition between the tree species and the grasses and shrubs for moisture and nutrients.

3. Wildlife: Domestic livestock will continue to utilize vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species for life history functions within this allotment. The magnitude of livestock grazing impacts on wildlife is dependent upon the species of wildlife being considered, and its habitat needs. On this allotment, it can be generally stated that the sheep and the mule deer are in direct competition for forage. Livestock numbers and wildlife numbers have most likely reached a balance since the area has been grazed for over 100 years. Cover habitat for wildlife will increase as the pinion and juniper increases. Maintenance and operation of existing water locations will continue to provide dependable water sources for wildlife, as well as livestock.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species - Proposed Action: Surveys have been conducted in New Mexico for the mountain plover by Lawry Sager in 1995, for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (Sager, 1996). No breeding populations were found south of the 34<sup>th</sup> North Latitude which generally follows the Chaves/DeBaca County line on the north end of the Roswell Field Office area. However, no birds were reported in either DeBaca or Chaves Counties; only one observation was reported in Lincoln County (near Lon). In addition, mountain plover surveys were conducted in 1998 at BLM selected sites by New Mexico Natural Heritage Program (DeLay & Johnson, 1998). No mountain plovers were observed at the sites. As mountain plovers prefer short vegetation and actually seek out grazed pastures, the cumulative impacts from grazing are not anticipated to adversely affect the bird. Grazing practices which maintain or improve ground cover to the greatest extent possible could decrease mountain plover habitat. The preferred alternative will continue to emphasize proper watershed management, but is unlikely to adversely affect this species or its habitat in the mixed desert shrub area. Since no known wintering locales or breeding sites have been found and no known prairie dog towns are located within this allotment, proper grazing management is not likely to jeopardize, destroy or adversely modify the habitat.

5 Livestock Management: Livestock would continue to be grazed under the same management system. No adverse impacts are anticipated under the proposed action.

6. Visual Resources The continued grazing of livestock would not affect the form or color of the landscape. The primary appearance of the vegetation within the allotment will remain the same.

7. Water Quality. Direct impacts to surface water quality would be minor, short-term impacts during storm event. Indirect impacts to water-quality related resources, such as fisheries, would not occur. The proposed action would not have a significant effect on ground water. Livestock would be dispersed over the allotment, and the soil would filter potential contaminants.

8. Air Quality: Dust levels under the proposed action would be slightly higher than under the no grazing alternative due to allotment management activities. The levels would still be within the limits allowed in a Class 11 area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality.

9. Recreation: Grazing would have little or no affect on the recreational opportunities, since the recreating public has limited legal or physical access to the public lands. Recreation activities that could occur within this grazing allotment are limited or nonexistent due to land status patterns and lack of public access to the larger parcels.

10. Caves/Karst: No known significant caves or karst features are known to exist on the public lands located within this allotment. Grazing would not affect the karst resources.

## **B. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative.**

1. Soils: Soil compaction would be reduced on the allotment around old trails and bedding grounds, there would be a small reduction in soil loss on the allotment.

2. Vegetation: It is expected that the number of plant species found within the allotment will remain the same, however, there would be small changes in the relative percentages of these species. Vegetation will continue to be utilized by wildlife. There would be an increase in the amount of standing vegetation. The pinion and juniper are expected to increase under this alternative.

3. Wildlife: Wildlife would have no competition with livestock for forage and cover.

4. T & E - Alternative No Grazing: There would be no change in the mountain plover habitat if the no grazing alternative was selected.

5. Livestock management: The forage from public land would be unavailable for use by the lessee. This would have an adverse economic impact to the livestock operation. If the No Grazing alternative is selected, the owner of the livestock would be responsible for ensuring that livestock do not enter Public Land [43 CFR 4140. 1 (b)(1)]. The land status pattern on the allotment makes it economically unfeasible to fence out the public land and use only the private land and state land.

6. Visual Resources: There would be no change in the visual resources.

7. Water Quality: There could be a slight improvement in water quality due to the minor reductions in sediment loading during storm events.

8. Air Quality: There would be a slightly less dust under this alternative versus the proposed alternative, but this would be negligible when considering all sources of dust.

9. Recreation: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.

10. Caves/Karst: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.

## **V. Cumulative Impacts**

All of the allotments that have permits/leases with the BLM will have to go through scoping and analysis under NEPA. Allotment 63092 is near allotments that will be undergoing this process. If the proposed action is selected, there would be no change in the cumulative impacts since it does not vary from the current situation.

If the no livestock grazing alternative is selected, there would be little change in the cumulative impact as long as the surrounding allotments continue to be stocked at their current level. If the



leased numbers are reduced on the surrounding ranches as well, the economics of the surrounding communities and/or minority/low income populations would be negatively impacted.

The No Grazing alternative was considered, but not chosen in the Rangeland Reform Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Record of Decision (ROD) (p. 28). The elimination of grazing in the Roswell Field Office Area was also considered but eliminated by the Roswell RMP/ROD (pp. **ROD-2**).

## **VI. Residual Impacts**

Vegetative monitoring studies have shown that grazing, at the current leased numbers of animals, is sustainable. If the mitigation measures are enacted, then there would be no residual impacts to the proposed action.

## **VII. Mitigating Measures**

Vegetation monitoring studies will continue to be conducted and the leased numbers of livestock will be adjusted if necessary. If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken at that time to mitigate those impacts.

## **VIII. Fundamentals of Rangeland Health**

The fundamentals of rangeland health are identified in 43 CFR §§4 180.1 and pertain to watershed function, ecological process, water quality, and habitat for threatened and endangered (T&E) species and other special status species. Based on the available data and professional judgement, the evaluation by this environmental assessment indicates that the conditions identified in the fundamentals of rangeland health exist on this allotment.

## **IX. BLM Team Members**

Jim Schroeder, Hydrologist John Spain, Rangeland Management Specialist Tim Kreager, Area Manager, (reviewing for Hazardous Waste Specialist) Irene Gonzales-Salas, Realty Specialist Jerry Dutchover, Minerals Geologist Rand French, Wildlife Biologist Pat Flanary, Archeologist Paul Happel, Outdoor Recreation Planner Howard Parman, Resource Planner